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25 Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888)

Abstract: Published in the year 1888, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* created a unique blend of time travel narrative, romance, social(ist) critique, gothic anxiety, populism, technological progressivism, and utopian betterment that became an instant bestseller and an effective tool for political activism. This chapter discusses how Bellamy managed to bring together traditions of transcendentalist thinking with the social upheavals of the 1880s and the twin desires of greater equality concerning questions of democratic participation as well as greater efficiency in matters of social engineering. Juxtaposing the distressing contemporaneousness of the Gilded Age with a glorious future, the genius of Bellamy's utopian vision lay in his ability to realign the political value and emotional power of equality with the desires of an emerging modern culture fuelled by dreams of technological ease, consumption, and the enjoyment of popular entertainment.

Keywords: Edward Bellamy; *Looking Backward 2000–1887;* utopian fiction; equality; democracy; nationalism; technology and culture

1 Context: A Bestseller of Utopian Fiction

Edward Bellamy's novel *Looking Backward 2000–1887* was the most popular and influential utopian novel in the United States of the late nineteenth century. Published in 1888, it sold several hundred thousand copies, was translated into numerous languages, spawned literary responses, and influenced many writers and intellectuals such as William Dean Howells, Thorstein Veblen, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and John Dewey (Khanna 1988; Beaumont 2007; Pfaelzer 1984, 47–51). More significantly, and quite remarkable for a work of speculative fiction, it had direct political consequences. Following Bellamy's utopian vision, a network of clubs was initiated to propagate and put into action the proposals developed in his novel. While they shared many characteristics with socialism, Bellamy preferred to call his political vision "nationalism" and thus gave birth to a movement of Nationalist Clubs (Bowman 1986; Aaron 1951, 92–132).

Bellamy wrote his novel at a time of social upheaval and protest – the so-called Gilded Age as Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner had ambiguously dubbed the period following the end of the Civil War. While the industrial revolution and the booming businesses of the railroads, steel, and oil had brought hitherto unimaginable riches to industrial tycoons like John D. Rockefeller or Cornelius Vanderbilt,

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workers living in poverty and toiling for eighty hours per week demanded a fair share of the profits. The Gilded Age was an age of growth and industrial development but also of business crises, monopolies, strikes, and labor unrest (Fink 2015). Industrialization, urbanization, immigration, and the emergence of a mass-based consumer culture were changing the very foundations of U.S. American culture, shifting it toward a modern, technology-driven society, away from the rural, small-town mores and mentalities of earlier times.

Bellamy's novel imagined the year 2000 as a point in time when a radical transformation had changed and resolved many of the labor-related problems and instances of social injustice. However, in real life, after a substantial financial crisis occurred in the year 2008 and started the so-called Great Recession, many political movements eerily echoed Bellamy's criticism of the 1880s. While he had repeatedly argued against the unfair concentration of wealth, noting, in 1894, that "seventy-one percent of the aggregate wealth of the nation is already held by nine percent of the population" (1984b [1894], 123), social movements of the twenty-first century like Occupy Wall Street railed against the one percent of haves as opposed to the ninety-nine percent of have-nots. Thus contradicting Bellamy's hopes for a bright future of U.S. American society, the issues of social injustice, the concerns over the distribution of wealth, and the lack of democratic participation, all of which had fuelled Bellamy's attempt to imagine an alternative economic system, appeared to be even more pressing in the time period that his novel had portrayed as the golden age of harmony and prosperity.

Still, Bellamy's utopian vision and the activist repercussions it generated in the late nineteenth century may be seen as a crucial literary phenomenon supporting the gradual transition towards the reform oriented era of Progressivism. To be sure, as a work of utopian fiction, *Looking Backward* stood in a long line of works going back to examples such as *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More, yet, appearing at a prolific moment in U.S. American literature, it also created a unique blend of literary techniques and aesthetics. Eschewing the thick description of realism, the regional specificity of local color fiction, and the taboo-breaking explorations of naturalism, Bellamy's novel combined three literary elements: first, it imparted knowledge about the utopian world through a constant, instructive dialogue between a young male hero and an older inhabitant of the future society; second, it introduced a romantic heterosexual relationship shaped by traditions of sentimental and domestic fiction; finally, it coupled utopian instruction and domestic romance with a modern discourse about the vision of a technology-based mass and consumer culture responsive to the needs of the people and revolving around the pursuit of happiness (Seeber 1982; Roemer 1989; Fluck 1996, 310–322). Thus combining the twin desires of reform and pleasure, Bellamy had found a wildly successful formula not only capable of laying out a serious political argument but in tune with popular sentiments of self-improvement, progress, consumerism, and an image of life as morally good and easy.

While the novel's popularity attested to the timeliness of Bellamy's utopian vision, his conceptual fusion of moral, industrial, and technological issues had evolved over

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several decades and incorporated various cultural discourses. Raised in an old New England family with strong Puritan and Calvinist roots and spending his youth in the village of Chicopee, Mass., Edward Bellamy's early writings revolved around questions of faith and identity (Bowman 1986; Morgan 1944). In an early essay from 1874 called "The Religion of Solidarity" – inspired by the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson yet departing from his conclusions (Auerbach 1994, 38–39) – he developed a notion of human nature as being divided between the "lesser self" of the individual's personal life and the "greater self" of the universal or impersonal life. Viewing individualism as a form of confinement and, in fact, "a prison" (1984d [1874], 10), the twenty-four year-old Bellamy envisioned the sublime fusion and transcendence of human souls as the highest aspiration. Indeed, giving up the lesser self of the individual for the greater self of the group and the infinite became the cornerstone of his attempt to redefine religious beliefs in philosophical terms. Bellamy saw it as an irresistible passion for unity, "This passion for losing ourselves in others or for absorbing them into ourselves, which rebels against individuality as an impediment, is then the expression of the greatest law of solidarity" (1984d [1874], 18). Following from this intense passion, the religion of solidarity, as Bellamy called it, was based on the idea of giving up one's personal identity, "Unselfishness, self-sacrifice, is the essence of morality" (1984d [1874], 22). In this early essay, and pointing to the more elaborate design of *Looking Backward*, the image of the soldier sacrificing his body for his country and the "instinct of nationalism" (1984d [1874], 21) became the conceptual and affective core of Bellamy's vision for the unification of individualism and solidarity at a higher level.

At the same time, the question of solidarity or, more generally, the concept of the social and its relation with individualism, was no longer primarily an issue of morality, it was increasingly shaped by economic relations. In U.S. American literature stories like "The Iron Mills" (1861) by Rebecca Harding Davis had begun to explore the dreary living conditions of immigrants working in steel mills. The new economic and industrial realities were seen to challenge the close interdependence of the democratic political system with the moral values of the culture at large. Bellamy argued that, in the context of the United States, the term socialism could be defined as the "the application of the democratic method to the economic administration of a people" (1984b [1894], 122). In this sense, and echoing earlier arguments, Bellamy saw economic life as being circumscribed by and subordinate to democratic values and norms. For Catharine Beecher in "A Treatise on Domestic Economy" (1843) or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) but also in the final pages of Frederick Douglass's highly influential *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845), the systematic and efficient organization of the domestic economy as well as the happiness and fulfillment of work were seen to be the moral and cultural equivalents of the democratic promise (Allen 2005; ↗15 Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). All manners and moral values in a democracy, including the ones generated in the economic sphere, were to be shaped by the democratic norms of equality, freedom, and self-government.

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Conversely, through a New England-based cultural lens, this meant that developments in the Gilded Age such as an overindulgent individualism, wastefulness, or idleness had to be interpreted as signs of a defective democracy, a failure of the democratic promise. Bellamy's answer to this dilemma came to form the heart of his utopian vision. If the concentration of wealth, the hierarchization of class relations, and a wasteful, glutted system of production were the hallmarks of capitalism in the Gilded Age, then the basic tenets of U.S. American democracy were in danger of being crushed by the process of industrial expansion. The only solution to this seemed to be "the feature of absolute economic equality" (1984a [1894], 118). Thus applying democratic norms of equality to the economic system, Bellamy forged a vision of nationalism that went beyond the then current notions of socialism by claiming that the "distribution of the cooperative product among the members of the community" had to be "always and absolutely equal" (1984b [1894], 126). Absolute equality should guarantee social and economic justice, and it was the focal point for Bellamy's notion that the greater self should eventually triumph over the lesser self, that social cohesion was ultimately more important than individualism and individual differences.

2 Close Reading: A Maximum of Comfort, a Minimum of Trouble

Edward Bellamy opened *Looking Backward* with a preface written by an anonymous author from the Historical Section of Shawmut College (Boston) in the year 2000. Before stepping aside to let Julian West – the novel's homodiegetic narrator – tell his story, the fictive historian explained that it had been attempted "to alleviate the instructive quality of the book by casting it in the form of a romantic narrative" (1960 [1888], xxi–xxii). Thus pointing to the dynamic between romance and history, love interest and utopian instruction, the novel opened with a clever framing device addressing the reader as if he or she had already made the transition to the year 2000 and was looking backward to the social situation of the late nineteenth century – the actual social context of the historical readership.

In the following twenty-eight chapters, Julian West tells his incredible story of going to sleep in the year 1887 and waking up 113 years later in the year 2000 to experience the miraculously changed environment of the city of Boston. Julian wakes up in the home of Dr. Leete, who serves as the patient guide to the new world, explaining the workings of the social system, while his young and beautiful daughter Edith Leete gradually emerges as Julian's romantic interest. She becomes a guardian figure, first providing emotional and mental stability whenever Julian suffers from severe states of confusion, then confessing her love for him, and finally revealing that she is the great-granddaughter of Julian's nineteenth-century fiancé, Edith Bartlett. Moving from West's sound-proof underground chamber to the home of Dr. Leete, from the

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misery and squalor of Boston in the nineteenth century to the impressive prosperity of the city in the twenty-first, Bellamy's novel was anchored in both, domestic and urban space, and it was modeled on an adventure of time travel characteristic of modern utopian fictions (Frye 1966). Ideals of domesticity and homeliness connected the old and the new world but everything else had suddenly and shockingly changed for Julian West.

The plot structure of the novel exploited the suddenness of this transition – West's jumping ahead in time – by alternating between distinct settings and scenes. While most chapters were devoted to Dr. Leete explaining to Julian, and thus by implication to the readers, how the new world was organized, several interspersed chapters recounted moments of confusion and identity crisis, even horror at the "idea that I was two persons, that my identity was double" (67). Julian was overwhelmed and horrorstruck after walking through the streets of modern Boston, after visiting the remains of his underground chamber, and after dreaming that his journey to the future society had been a dream and he was still living in the nightmare of the nineteenth century. In all of these cases he was eventually reassured of the reality of having made the transition to a better world, and often this reassurance was provided by his love interest Edith Leete. Yet, this dizzying sense of doubling and mental confusion caused by the suddenness of the jump through time was more than a literary device intensifying the romantic narrative. It was a clever way of playing with the reader's incredulity vis-à-vis the perfection of the new world by keeping the ideal of the perfect future and the reality of the dismal past in constant tension (Seeber 1982). Moreover, it evoked a mode of experience that was beginning to be felt by Bellamy's historical readership: the uses of communication technologies such as the telegraph or the telephone, which were in the process of redefining notions of time and space. Technology as a source of entertainment and pleasure, but also as the crucial way of connecting domestic and social space, the indiviual and the nation, had moved to the center of Bellamy's vision of the future.

Yet, for the most part, Dr. Leete's explanations revolved around the various solutions to the most pressing industrial and economic problems. Despite being a relatively slim novel, *Looking Backward* tried to present an exhaustive overview of solutions ranging from industry, wages, and work to education, from housing, consumption, and public life to gender relations. Indeed, Bellamy's sequel *Equality* from 1897 was even more comprehensive and consequently read like a political tract rather than a work of imaginative fiction. The book from 1888, combining social critique and utopian speculation with gothic elements and sentimental romance, developed a number of crucial arguments about the design of the future society (↗2 Romance and Gothic). The most important question addressed the power of monopolies and trusts and their relation to labor in the late nineteenth century. As Dr. Leete explained, small companies had increasingly been squeezed out by larger corporations, which combined to form trusts and dominated business by fixing prices. Contradicting earlier ideals of free competition, this "corporate tyranny" (52) was seen to go against basic

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tenets of an earlier agrarian and preindustrial society. Yet Bellamy's utopia did not envision a nostalgic return to premodern times, on the contrary, the economic system was to move beyond corporate monopolies by being completely taken over by the nation and thus by being owned by the people. As Dr. Leete put it, "The epoch of trusts had ended in The Great Trust" (54). This not only meant that the means of production had been nationalized, it embraced the power of machines and the systemic logic of large-scale businesses:

> It had come to be recognized as an axiom that the larger the business the simpler the principles that can be applied to it; that, as the machine is truer than the hand, so the system, which in a great concern does the work of the master's eye in a small business, turns out more accurate results. (55)

This idea of a centralized and simplified system of production lay at the heart of Bellamy's concept of nationalism and it influenced major parts of his utopian vision to secure social and economic equality. Taking his cues from the organization of military service, everyone would have to serve a fixed period of industrial service, eventually working in a field most suited to personal aptitude and choice. Echoing his earlier essay "The Religion of Solidarity," Bellamy was attracted to the model of the army because for him it combined organizational and affective imperatives, "The army of industry is an army, not alone by virtue of its perfect organization, but by reason also of the ardor of self-devotion which animates its members" (79). This feeling of animation by becoming a part of the national body harked back to the passion of losing oneself in the greater self, yet it was squarely directed at the secular realm of the industrial army and the idea of service as the only road to individual fulfillment and recognition, as Dr. Leete explained, "With us, diligence in the national service is the sole and certain way to public repute, social distinction, and official power. The value of a man's services to society fixes his rank in it" (79).

Since the nation was the only producer of goods it could ensure that everyone would receive the same share of wages and it could guarantee the maintenance of the people, making the accumulation of wealth unnecessary. Moreover, as Julian West learned in continuous, if often one-sided conversations with Dr. Leete, in a nationalized industry private property was no longer needed and money was abolished in favor of a credit system. Indeed, the whole system of economic transactions was regarded as furthering individual differences and going against the ideal of equality, and it was consequently abolished:

> According to our ideas, buying and selling is essentially antisocial in all its tendencies. It is an education in self-seeking at the expense of others, and no society whose citizens are trained in such a school can possibly rise above a very low grade of civilization. (73)

Doing away with buying, selling, and money while at the same time guaranteeing abundant high quality products through cooperative planning and national

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production, the utopian society also abolished competition. As Dr. Leete explained, this decision was not only based on moral grounds, it also expressed an ecological consciousness of using natural resources in the best way, "Competition, which is the instinct of selfishness, is another word for dissipation of energy, while combination is the secret of efficient production; and not till the idea of increasing the common stock can industrial combination be realized, and the acquisition of wealth really begin" (166).

Since competition was no longer desired, industrial production would be less wasteful because it could use natural resources and manpower more efficiently. In this sense, Bellamy expanded the earlier cultural discourse on efficiency in domestic economies to a national level while at the same time presenting his vision as the epitome of a modern, industry and machine-oriented society. True to his earlier writings, this form of nationalism did not thrive on eccentric, antisocial individualism, individual wealth, or self-aggrandizement. Rather, the highest form of recognition and honor came from being chosen by the people, by receiving a "red ribbon awarded by the vote of the people to the great authors, artists, engineers, physicians, and inventors of the generation" (119). Thus, following from the establishment of The Great Trust, the nationalization of production would ensure industrial and ecological efficiency, equal shares of service and wages would abolish hierarchies and economic injustice, and the post-materialistic mind-set would increase the sense of community and the public good.

What made Bellamy's speculative fiction so attractive was that it proposed this transformation as an evolutionary and peaceful rather than a revolutionary development, thus allowing for the fantasy that gradual change was possible. Moreover, by portraying the future as profiting from "labor-saving inventions in all sorts of industry" resulting in a "maximum of comfort and minimum of trouble" (92), Bellamy created the vision of a future not only more equal, cooperative, and prosperous but also providing luxury and comfort to the masses. For instance, in one scene Julian West is introduced to a music room located in Dr. Leete's house. It is connected by telephone to live performances and all other houses in the city and provides a program of music for twenty-four hours. Seated comfortably in a chair, West listens to music and a sermon, thereby sharing in the life of the public while at the same time remaining in the safe zone of domestic space – an early vision of radio entertainment. For a novel propagating the importance of the public as a meeting ground of the nation, Dr. Leete's explanation that "most of our preaching, like our musical performances, is not in public, but delivered in acoustically prepared chambers" (183) must have come as a surprise, yet it represented a typical stance in Bellamy's modern utopia. While the nation served as the ideal of the greater self, it was more enjoyable and comfortable to experience the fusion of lesser and greater selves in the virtual space of mediated music and at a safe remove – an entertaining, machine-induced transcendence.

Of the few scenes showing public life in the novel, chapter ten is devoted to Julian West and Edith Leete's going shopping and, in the process, of her introducing him to the logistics of consumption. Upon entering his first public building in utopian Boston, Julian is overwhelmed by the spectacle and splendor of the architecture:

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> I was in a vast hall full of light, received not alone from the windows on all sides, but from the dome, the point of which was a hundred feet above. Beneath it, in the center of the hall, a magnificent fountain played, cooling the atmosphere to a delicious freshness with its spray. (81)

In this atmosphere of luxury and relaxation, frequented, as West noted, by both sexes, the activity of shopping was markedly different from the competitive and hustling business practices of the late nineteenth century, "Around the fountain was a space occupied with chairs and sofas, on which many persons were seated conversing" (81–82). As Edith explained, all shops contained the same assortment of goods and, as a rule, shopping was not done for conspicuous or ostentatious consumption. To create an efficient distribution system, a network of "pneumatic transmitters" (84) connected the central warehouse with the shops, and the products were delivered directly to the homes of shoppers. Again, these elements of Bellamy's utopia combined the imperatives of efficient planning and an ecologically sustainable use of resources with the comforts of easy shopping, but they also contributed to the paradox that in the new society built around serving the nation technology made meeting physically in public less frequent and necessary.

In this vein, the sermon transmitted to Dr. Leete's music room was delivered by a preacher called Mr. Barton and enjoyed from the vantage point of an easy chair. While many of Dr. Leete's explanations covered the secular ground of the political economy, Barton's sermon drew on a religious rhetoric to give legitimacy to the utopia and to demonstrate that Bellamy's interpretation of socialism was not moving away from religious beliefs but – echoing his earliest writings – anchored in the discourse of a transcendental spirituality (Cantor 1988; Tumber 1999). The central metaphor of the sermon compared humanity to "a rosebush planted in a swamp, watered with black bog water, breathing miasmatic fogs by day, and chilled with poison dews at night" (192). Mr. Barton claimed that by changing the environment and transplanting the rosebush to "sweet, warm dry earth, where the sun bathed it" (193), the new world, into which Julian West had traveled through time, had reasserted two fundamental characteristics about human nature.

On the one hand, according to Barton, the new ethics of self-sacrifice revealed that "human nature in its essential qualities is good, not bad, that men by their natural intention and structure are generous, not selfish, pitiful, not cruel, sympathetic, not arrogant" (191). On the other, the sermon linked the utopian vision of goodness and equality with eschatological hopes of progress and the improvement of humanity:

> The betterment of mankind from generation to generation, physically, mentally, morally, is recognized as the one great object supremely worthy of effort and of sacrifice. We believe the race for the first time to have entered on the realization of God's ideal of it, and each generation must now be a step upward. (194)

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Metaphorically pitting the deathly swamp against fertile land, selfishness against self-sacrifice, cruelty against kindness, and many other similar oppositions, *Looking Backward* managed to contrast notions of reality and ideality that harked back to dominant U.S. American cultural tropes such as democracy, equality, and progress but also incorporated future-oriented ideas of industry and the machine age. Finding the right balance between different, often contradictory forces was a crucial part of Bellamy's formula enabling his literary and political success, but it also loomed large in the criticism of his vision and the interpretations of his novel.

3 Theoretical Perspectives: Paradoxes of Utopian Fiction

The critical reception of *Looking Backward* focused almost exclusively on the specifics of its utopian design, seeing the novel less as an innovative literary work than a bold attempt to seriously reimagine the future of U.S. American society and culture. An early review by the British writer and socialist William Morris, who later wrote his own speculative *News from Nowhere* (1889), voiced a substantial critique. In particular he found fault with two core assumptions of Bellamy's utopia, the idea of a national centralization and the dependence on machinery. Both assumptions seemed to establish a new society doomed to be less free and less democratic than Bellamy was hoping for. Since national centralization was closely linked with the idea of industrial service, Morris pointed out that although Bellamy claimed that "every man is free to choose his occupation and that work is no burden to anyone, the impression which he produces is that of a huge standing army, tightly drilled, compelled by some mysterious fate to unceasing anxiety for the production of wares to satisfy every caprice" (Morris 1993 [1889], 356). Following Morris, Bellamy's central flaw was to regard society itself as a kind of machine and thus to rest his hopes on the improvements of its workings. Yet, according to Morris, who propagated decentralization and the pleasure of work itself, one of the main problems with technology was that, as a dynamic force, it could not provide solutions but rather generated new desires and demands; as he put it, "the multiplication of machinery will just – multiply machinery" (Morris 1993 [1889], 357).

This early critique introduced important themes that were taken up and further developed in subsequent decades. While some authors pointed to Bellamy as representing an authoritarian and antidemocratic socialism, others highlighted his dependence on technocratic elites and the excessive power of a bureaucratic administration (Wagar 1988; Lipow 1982; Fromm 1960). In both cases, Bellamy's aim to reclaim democratic norms and to revitalize democratic values seemed to get lost in his idea of a centralized industrial service and in his predominant image of a culture of consumption. Writing a foreword to the novel in 1960, the social philosopher Erich

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Fromm pointed to this, by now, more pressing dilemma of modern consumer societies losing inner values and beliefs due to the rituals of shopping and entertainment, "The well-fed, well-clad, and well-amused man is our goal – a man who *has* much and *uses* much – but *is* little" (Fromm 1960, xiii; emphasis in original). Echoing Morris, but generally more sympathetic to the novel, Fromm also found fault with Bellamy's idea of national centralization. It seemed to contradict the spirit of democracy but, more importantly, it diverted from basic tenets of a socialist utopia, "The aim of socialism was individuality, not uniformity; liberation from economic bonds, not the making of material aims into the main concern of life" (Fromm 1960, xvii). Thus, while Bellamy had legitimized his notion of nationalism as a radicalized form of socialism intended to guarantee absolute equality, the ramifications of centralized planning, military discipline, and self-sacrifice for the nation were interpreted as an authoritarian nightmare in later decades.

To be sure, *Looking Backward* had grappled with a major difficulty in its utopian design: what would happen if individuals would not want to be integrated into the nation, or would not agree to fulfill their industrial service? In these cases, Dr. Leete explained, "A man able to duty, and persistently refusing, is sentenced to solitary imprisonment on bread and water till he consents" (1960 [1888], 96). This vision of strict discipline clearly contradicted Bellamy's inclination to democratize economic relations, and it revealed a hierarchical and authoritarian bent to his ideas. The difficulty for Bellamy, then, was how to reconcile the notions of equality and difference in a way that would not produce new forms and feelings of injustice. He wrote, "The law of service must be uniform, but the services rendered will vary greatly – with many entire exemptions – according to the abilities of the people. The inequality of contributions will in no way prejudice the invariable law of equal distribution of the resultant sum" (1984b [1894], 127). This crucial idea that everybody would fulfill their service according to their abilities but all would receive the same share of distributions certainly sounded good in theory but presupposed the notion that all disruptions due to psychological motivations, individual desires, or human nature could eventually be contained through disciplinary means. As Wagar observes, Bellamy "tempered his positivism with a dash of mysticism and Christian piety, but what stands out most in his social philosophy is its typically late nineteenth-century rejection of liberal and democratic values in favor of collective action marshalled by men of experience and expertise" (1988, 112). Thus the first important instances of critique in response to Bellamy's novel revolved around different interpretations of socialism, the antidemocratic subjugation of the individual under the collective will of the nation, and the authoritarian regime of an industrial army – all of which would become focal points of dystopian fictions in the twentieth century.

Bellamy was well aware of his critics and tried to refute their various points in his writings, and by publishing the sequel *Equality* in 1897 – expanding, for instance, passages devoted to women's rights and agriculture. In an essay from 1890 called

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"Some Misconceptions of Nationalism," he defended *Looking Backward* as, among other things, favoring a "robust individuality" (1984c [1890], 90). To him, many of the criticisms were missing the major point of his attack, which was the political system and the power of big corporations. As Bellamy saw it, "national cooperation" was "the only way possible whereby to preserve republican equality and popular institutions against the vast aggregations of capital which are mastering this country" (1984c [1890], 93). This defense of republicanism, then, was politically motivated but, as cultural historians such as John F. Kasson and Cecelia Tichi have pointed out, it also provided an alternative way of understanding Bellamy's depiction of technology.

In contrast to the critique of the novel's emphasis on machinery and managerialism, Kasson argued that the novel participated in a specifically U.S. American discourse on machines that saw them as both useful and beautiful, generating an aesthetic response that was "firmly rooted in republican values" (1999, 142). Seen through this cultural lens, Bellamy's network of telephone connections, pneumatic transmitters, or tubes delivering goods to the people's homes not only increased their comfort, it put technology in the service of republican ideals by making it a "model of efficiency and justice" (Neustadter 1988, 24), and a "precondition for morality," as Pfaelzer argues, "allowing citizens to merge in 'transcendental' solidarity" (1988, 60). In this sense, technology helped to establish equality, avoided the wasting of resources, and created unity at the level of the greater self. Furthermore, the technology-based networks that Julian West encountered in the utopian future, working with magical precision and ease, implicitly forged the vision of a new U.S. American art form linking the beauty of machines with their usefulness for the nation's history of progress (Kasson 1999, 139–180; Tichi 1987, 41–75).

For instance, in *Equality* the accoustic network of music rooms was expanded to include the sense of vision, and Julian West described that he could travel the whole world without leaving his chair. Indeed, Bellamy envisioned a global system of sound and vision that would allow immediate access to any kind of "spectacle or accident of particular interest" (1897, 205) happening anywhere. Yet, just as West had experienced a sense of confusion and doubling in the first novel, the sequel introduced an even stronger sense of dislocation, as Julian exclaimed, "I can stand no more of this just now! I am beginning to doubt seriously whether I am in or out of the body" (Bellamy 1897, 205). Bellamy's attempt to present technologies in the service of republican values thus implicitly pointed to the ambiguities and paradoxes of the new globalized reach of the emerging mass media. Not only did they introduce ambiguous experiences and states of the body, they also established a new epistemological regime, a new way of perceiving and witnessing the world's events (Williams 1999; Decker 2004; Lowenstein 2011). One paradoxical consequence of this regime was that the public realm, though crucial for a vision of solidarity and union, in fact became less spatially concrete and locatable (Tumber 1999). As Julian West explained, in the future society, people stayed at home and used technology to see and hear what was going on in the world; its global reach opened up a new, at the same time liberating

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and disconcerting, form of vicarious experience, "it is possible in slippers and dressing gown for the dweller to take his choice of the public entertainments given that day in every city of the earth" (Bellamy 1897, 348).

To be sure, this image of retreat, even regression had already been present in *Looking Backward's* nineteenth-century motif of a sound-proof underground sleeping chamber shielding Julian West from the noise and despair of social unrest (Seeber 1982). But in the utopian context of the twenty-first century's celebration of national cooperation and social unity, the vision of the people as isolated individuals watching public life from the safety of their homes underscored Bellamy's notion of technology as an ambiguous and contradictory tool (Segal 1994, 101–116). It was at the same time helping to create the morally and socially exemplary nation *and* undermining the idea of national cohesion by allowing the individuals to withdraw as much as possible from public life and social interaction (Auerbach 1994, 37–38). Bellamy's vision of moral and social perfectability through technological means – an idea that could be traced back to *Doctor Heidenhoff's Process* (Khanna 1988; Hall 1997) – was thus steeped in a modern constellation creating its own internal contradictions and difficulties. While the idea of machines in the service of republican values was clearly portrayed as a sign of social progress as well as individual comfort and pleasure, it was also, as Kasson (1999) has argued, invariably linked in Bellamy's novel with the countervailing republican tradition of discipline and control, "Seizing power from a capitalist elite, he thrust it into the hands of a technocratic one" (202). Although Bellamy's utopian discourse was trying to establish the palpable reality of a future society having successfully made the transition to a state of perfection, then, it also gave expression to an authoritarian and antidemocratic undertow that threatened its vision of peace and prosperity.

As some critics argued, these characteristics of the novel could ultimately only be understood by turning to its qualities as a work of speculative fiction. In Northrop Frye's terms, *Looking Backward* was a "straight" utopia imagining an ideal state, yet since utopian speculation was taking place in the imaginative medium of literature it could not actually realize its vision because "the literary imagination is less concerned with achieving ends than with visualizing possibilities" (Frye 1966, 31). In contrast to other influential literary utopias such as *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) by William Dean Howells or *Herland* (1915) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman – both of which had been influenced by Bellamy and the movement of Nationalist Clubs (Strauss 1988) – Bellamy had designed his novel as a piece of "reform-propaganda" (Gardiner 1988, 70), an invitation to realize the steps and reforms described in the book. Numerous literary techniques contributed to this propagandistic design contrasting the real and the ideal: the doubling of identities, the motif of time travel, the uses of dreams, and, in the final scenes, Julian's hallucination of seeing two faces at the same time, the good and bad images superimposed upon one another, the horror of the past and the glory of the future, "Like a wavering translucent spirit face superimposed upon each of these brutish masks I saw the ideal, the possible face that would have been

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the actual if mind and soul had lived" (Bellamy 1960 [1888], 214). And yet, as a work of imaginative fiction, the aim of changing its readers by means of literature, by fostering "the transformation of the self" (Khanna 1988, 44), had to be negotiated with the demands and logic of fiction itself.

In a revealing passage, the novel acknowledged the difficulties of this dialectic between the wish fulfillment of the realized utopia and the workings of literature. Here, Julian West, curious about the literature of the future, was referred to the book *Penthesilia* by an author called Berrian to learn about contemporary stories of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Having read the book, Julian found that, although it recounted a romance, it would have been unthinkable in the nineteenth century since "all effects drawn from the contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement, high and low" (Bellamy 1960 [1888], 123) were missing from the story. Significantly, Bellamy did not include any passages from this future novel but used it for an environmentalist argument that a perfect utopian state would produce fictional stories mirroring this state of perfection. And yet, *Looking Backward* itself was not aiming to be this morally and socially perfect narrative, it was thriving on discord and difference combined with the vision of eventually overcoming them in the future.

In more general terms, then, Bellamy's novel exemplified the tension between fictional narratives and utopian thinking. As Winfried Fluck has argued, while the novel needed the reader's imagination to envision the future, it was at the same time trying to contain and channel its activity. Since fiction depended on the depiction of difference and dramatic conflicts, its dramatic intensity had to be circumscribed in the same way as the social conflicts in order to support and stabilize the utopian ideal (Fluck 1997, 310–322). In this sense, Bellamy had to balance the simultaneous stimulation *and* containment of dramatic intensity to develop his political argument and legitimize his vision. Sharing these imperatives with the emerging fields of political propaganda and advertising, the utopian promise to jump ahead in time to a perfect state of wish fulfillment could never actually be realized in the medium of speculative fiction itself. Instead it intensified a dynamic of modern media narratives creating the desire for change and escape in ever more attractive and spectacular forms – from cinematic science-fiction to digital virtual reality – often reducing it to a form of entertainment that Bellamy's vision had also evoked but had embedded in the larger concept of social change.

If *Looking Backward* may thus be related to the history of science fiction and fantasy writing, to sentimental and domestic novels as well as the tradition of realistic depictions of social experience and change, the question remains how Bellamy's ideas for change and reform have held up. Writing his foreword to the novel in the year 1960, Erich Fromm claimed that Bellamy had propagated a form of humanistic socialism that was still pertinent in spite of the novel's bureaucratic and authoritarian tendencies. For Fromm (1960) the aims of economic and social transformation were not an end in itself, they should eventually lead to "the emancipation of man,

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and the overcoming of alienation" (xix). Several decades later, the cultural historian David R. Shumway claimed that the progressive metanarrative, for which Bellamy had created the most powerful model, was in decline. The belief "that we can create a more just, efficient, and peaceful way of life" (Shumway 2014, 51) no longer seemed to resonate in U.S. American culture in the same way as in previous times even though many social injustices were still unresolved. Thus, viewed from today's perspective, Bellamy's novel and its sequel represented one of the last instances in American literature of a wholeheartedly positive utopian fiction, while the history of science and technology as well as the experience of political oppression in the twentieth century shifted future oriented discourses irreversibly in the direction of dystopian speculation. And yet, while Bellamy's visions of centralization, managerialism, and technocratic elites have been discredited, his novel gave expression to an urgent, at times almost desperate desire for change as well as a heartfelt longing for justice, equality, and community that seem to have persisted through time, animating not only political movements but cultural and literary representations at large.

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